Herod *A Tragedy*

by Stephen Phillips

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BY

STEPHEN PHILLIPS

Feb. 19, 1924.

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
1922

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TO

HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE

IN LIFE A TRUE FRIEND, AND ON THE STAGE
THE HEROD OF MY DREAMS

I DEDICATE THIS TRAGEDY

This play is published in its present form to meet the demand which has arisen in connection with its production at Her Majesty's Theatre. The text has received such revision as was possible in the time; but the author hopes at some future day to return to the theme.

Characters of the Play

As produced at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, England, October 31, 1900

HEROD . . . . . MR. TREE.
King of the Jews.

ARISTOBULUS . . . . . MR. NORMAN SHARP.
High Priest and Brother of Mariamne.

GADIAS . . . . . MR. C. W. SOMERSET.
Chief Councillor.

SOHEMUS . . . . . MR. F. H. MACKLIN.
A Gaul.

PHERORAS . . . . . MR. F. PERCIVAL STEVENS.
Brother of Herod.

A PRIEST . . . . . MR. S. A. COOKSON.

A PHYSICIAN . . . . . MR. CHARLES FULTON.

SYLLÆUS . . . . . MR. J. FISHER WHITE
A Blind Man.

A CAPTAIN . . . . . MR. JAMES SMYTHE.

ENVOY FROM ROME . . . MR. C. F. COLLINGS.

CUP-BEARER . . . . . MR L'ESTRANGE.

SERVANT . . . . . MR. CAVENDISH MORTON.

MARIAMNE . . . . . MISS MAUD JEFFRIES.
Queen and Wife of Herod.

CYPROS . . . . . MISS BATEMAN (MRS. CROWE)
Mother of Herod.

BATHSHEBA . . . . . MISS ROSALIE JACOBI.
Maid to Mariamne.

HAGAR . . . . . MISS LILLIAN MOUBREY.
An Old Woman.

JUDITH . . . . . MISS FRANCES DILLON.
A Lady of the Court.

SALOME . . . . . MISS ELEANOR CALHOUN.
Sister of Herod.

ACT I

HEROD

TIME. — *Afternoon of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.*

SCENE. — *The great hall of audience in the Palace of Herod at Jerusalem, festooned with garlands and bravest offerings for the Feast of Tabernacles. Through the colonnade at back is seen the sacred Hill of Jerusalem, with the Temple courts and Castle of Antonia, separated from the Palace by the Tyropœon valley. On the* R. *a flight of stairs ascends to a gallery, leading to the royal apartments. At the top of this, guarding a bronze door, stands* SOHEMUS.

GADIAS *sits reading documents at foot of throne. As the Curtain rises, a faint sound of acclamation is heard without.* SOHEMUS *goes and gazes towards Jerusalem, then resumes his guard.*

Enter hurriedly three MESSENGERS.

1ST M. Is the king risen? From Samaria we,
Breathless, and with a burning tale to tell.

SOH. My place is here: to sentinel this door.

2ND M. But these are tidings —

SOH. Here I stand and stir not.

3RD M. Believe it, sir — look on this dust and haste.

SOH. I am a soldier, and obey.

1ST M. But, sir —
'T is Herod's throne — his life perhaps — this news —

SOH. Must wait.

1ST M. When is there hope of audience?

SOH. The king is taking now his noon-day sleep,
But shortly will descend with ceremony
To greet Aristobulus, the queen's brother,
Who from the Feast of Tabernacles comes,
Newly anoint High-Priest.

2ND M. Aristobulus?

1ST M. Why, 't is of him we come to speak.

3RD M. 'T is he
Whom the fanatics of Samaria
Would throne —

SOH. And then the king will sit in Council.

1ST M. Well, sirs — we must await the king: come then.

[MESSENGERS *retire into background.* SOHEMUS *resumes his guard. Enter below* SALOME *in agitation.*

SALOME. Is the king waked?

SOH. Princess, I stand on guard.
He hath commanded, and I know no more.

SALOME. Rouse him.

SOH. 'T is not in my direction.

SALOME. Then give way to me.

SOH. I stir not.

SALOME. I will pass.

SOH. Princess, not while I live.

SALOME. The king shall hear me.

Her arrogance, her stillness and her stare —

SOH. The king will hear no tale against the queen.

SALOME. Why, in the streets, along the public ways,

Are pointing figures, and a running taunt,

'See Herod's low-born sister!' And the children

Are lifted upon shoulders to behold

'The Idumean woman —' Now give way.

SOH. The king will hear no tale against the queen.

SALOME. O, 't is a madness, but it shall be cured

Now — and by me.

SOH. Princess, there is no passing.

SALOME. I am refused then. Am refused redress.

She turns and perceives GADIAS.

Ah there, Gadias! Witness you this thing?

Witness — I am denied by my own brother.

Where is the king then?

GADIAS. Well, he rests, no doubt.

All night he wanders through Jerusalem,

And listens in disguise the public talk,

And he resorts with priest and Pharisee,

With smithy gossips, bearers at the well,

With travellers and with feasters in the booths.

Little their talk will please him —

[*A cry of acclamation.*

SALOME. Whence that cry?

GADIAS. The multitude acclaims Aristobulus.

SALOME. Ah!

GADIAS. Well —

SALOME. I 'll bear no more with Mariamne,

Although the blood of all the Maccabees

Runs in her veins, and we are alien,
Alien and kinless, yet doth this excuse
That still superb unrealising stare
Or deeper and diviner disregard,
And silence full of arrows and of tongues?
And he shall hear me yet.

[*Exit.*

GADIAS. A woman's quarrel
And nothing more? Well —
[*To* SOHEMUS.] Is the king awake?

SOH. I know not, sir; here were three fellows, hot
Out of Samaria, and there too they scheme
To enthrone Aristobulus.

GADIAS. Still — and still
Aristobulus!

Enter PHERORAS.

Is the guard, Pheroras,
Safe? To be leaned on?

PHER. To the uttermost.

GADIAS. We shall have need of them.

PHER. And on the instant?
Some new thing?

GADIAS. In Samaria a plot
To crown Aristobulus.

PHER. Is the king
'Ware of all this?

GADIAS. He is 'ware of all things — but —

PHER. Why then?

GADIAS. The woman.

PHER. Who?

GADIAS. Always the woman.

PHER. But how?

GADIAS. The boy Aristobulus bears
Some likeness to his sister the loved queen,
Some mole at the back of his neck or —

PHER. Come, Gadias

GADIAS. Your pardon — he is like to Mariamne,
Therefore, although he may hurl Herod down,

We may not touch him — he may grasp the throne;
Well — he is like to Mariamne — or
He may kill Herod. Well, he is most like
To Mariamne. All to please the queen
He is made high-priest: Herod, to please the queen
Hath raised himself a rival in this boy.

[*During this speech various* COUNCILLORS, *etc., have come slowly in. Another cry of acclamation is heard.*

1ST COUN. Gadias, there is peril in that cry.

2ND COUN. For young Aristobulus is the shout.

3RD COUN. The darling of the multitude.

1ST COUN. And sprung
Of the old blood.

YOUNG COUN. And all behind him is
A sense of something coming on the world,
A crying of dead prophets from their tombs,
A singing of dead poets from their graves.

GADIAS. I ever dread the young: well, as you know,

Herod is our sole stay.

2ND COUN. Our brain — our arm.

PHER. He, he alone postpones the Roman doom.

3RD COUN. If Herod then by mutiny should fall —

1ST CAPT. That moment swoop the yelling eagles down.

2ND CAPT. Have those two eagles with the world for prey

Yet closed to talon reach?

PHER. I know not, sir.

COUN. Octavius Cæsar and Marc Antony.

GADIAS. Herod is fast bound unto Antony.

1ST CAPT. If Cæsar then should triumph —

GADIAS. Then 't were il

For friends of Antony.

COUN. Herod — and us.

2ND CAPT. But Antony 's the elder soldier —

GADIAS. Well —

PHER. Octavius is a lad —

GADIAS. The lad fights free,

No Cleopatra hangs about his neck.

Enter SERVANT *rapidly down gallery stairs.*

SERV. [*To* GADIAS.]

The king, sir, will descend with ceremony

To greet the new High-Priest Aristobulus.

GADIAS. And in what mood?

SERV. He hath said nothing, sir.

[*Another cry of acclamation.*

Listen, that cry. It was not for the king.

[*Music is heard from without, and grows louder as the procession of people from the Feasts of Tabernacles comes in dancing and carrying wreaths of fruit and flowers, with boughs of palm, willow and citron. Following them walks* CYPROS *and* SALOME, *and lastly* MARIAMNE, *leading* ARISTOBULUS *by the hand. As these take place by the foot of the throne, the door of the private apartments opens, and* HEROD, *ceremoni-*

ally dressed, comes down the stairs and seats himself on the throne. There is a loud acclamation for ARISTOBULUS, *and a faint one, led by* GADIAS, *for* HEROD.

MAR. [*Leading* ARISTOBULUS *before* HEROD.]

Herod, before all these I here would thank you
For honouring thus the Asmonean House.
And making thus my brother the high-priest.
Since his ancestral office he resumes,
We three are bound unto each other more:
With him the rites of peace, with thee the sword,
With me a reconciling love for both.

CH. PRIEST. [*Speaking on steps — advancing.*]

Oh, people, lo the anointed of the Lord;
May God send down on him His glory of old,
And for his sake forbear to bend the bow,
In the day of ire and darkness, in that day.
Lo, the High-Priest of God — Aristobulus.

[*A vast shout of acclamation, taken up by the throng;*

MARIAMNE *in sudden delight leaves* HEROD'S *side, and embraces* ARISTOBULUS.

MAR. Brother, I glow all o'er to hear your name
Cried and cried out. O thou art holy, child;
About thee is the sound of rushing wings
And a breathing as of angels thro' thy hair.
Yet, brother, even now forget me not.

ARIS. O Mariamne, tell me not. I am tired.

MAR. Even in this hour remember still faint dawns
When you and I together slipp'd away
To the dark fields, and cried out to each other
At each new flower we found.

ARIS. I am a man
Now, and must put such softnesses away.

MAR. Was ever brother loved as thou art loved?

ARIS. I am deaf with praises, and all dazed with flowers;
Cling any to me yet?

MAR. Yes, here and here.

ARIS. Give me that palm leaf, I will wear it so.

WOMAN. [*Advancing from the crowd.*]

O holy, wilt thou suffer these my children

To touch thy garment hem?

ARIS. Oh, yes.

[*The* CHILDREN *are brought forward and touch his robe.*

OLD MAN. And me

To kiss thy hands.

ARIS. My hands are worn with kisses.

OLD MAN. O thou of the old Asmonean blood,

Remember those dead priests that yet were kings.

[*A general shout.* HEROD'S *brow darkens.*

ARIS. Their blood is thrilling in me.

[*Another shout.*

MAR. Beautiful,

Thy face did dim the gold of the Temple — yet —

ARIS. Well, sister.

MAR. Oh, let it not lure thee, child.

[*She again puts her arm round his neck.*

ARIS. Ah, sister. Kiss me not. I am tired.

MAR. Still
Remember me. I am so wrapped in thee;
My love hath hovered round thee since thy birth;
I have suffered like a mother in my dreams
For thee.

ARIS. But oh, the raining of the blooms;
The cymbals and the roarings and the roses!
I seemed to drink bright wine and run on flowers.
Nay, Mariamne, how should I forget thee?

MAR. Child, I would be with thee to hold thee close.

ARIS. No, lean henceforth on my protecting arm.

MAR. Almost I could laugh at you, but 't is laughter
That dies off sudden.

CH. PRIEST. To the closing feast
Depart, O people, now, with song and dance.

[*Exeunt all but* HEROD *and* GADIAS.

HEROD. A child! Gadias, wandering night by night
Among the people of Jerusalem,
I hear a whispering of some new king,
A child that is to sit where I am sitting;
The general boding hath ta'en hold of me.
If this thing has been fated from the first —

GADIAS. It is the fault of dreamers to fear fate.

HEROD. [*Dreamily.*]
And he shall charm and smoothe, and breathe and bless,
The roaring of war shall cease upon the air,
Falling of tears and all the voices of sorrow,
And he shall take the terror from the grave.

GADIAS. The malady is too old and too long rooted.
The earth ailed from the first; war, pestilence,
Madness and death are not as ills that she
Contracted, but are in her bones and blood.

HEROD. And he shall still that old sob of the sea,
And heal the unhappy fancies of the wind,

And turn the moon from all that hopeless quest;
Trees without care shall blossom, and all the fields
Shall without labour unto harvest come.

GADIAS. Dangerous — labourers thrown from work rebel.

HEROD. A gentle sovereign. Ah, might there not be
Some power in gentleness we dream not of?

GADIAS. The gentle are tame birds that feed the hawk.

HEROD. To overcome by other ways than steel.

GADIAS. A somewhat sudden change of policy.
It has not been our way; and was not when
You murdered the whole Sanhedrin,
Nor when
You struck down Malchus on the Tyrian beach,
Or bribed Mark Antony to slay —

HEROD. Ah, no —
'T is not for us. A momentary thought

Like a strange breeze in darkness on the cheek.
Still must we trample, crush, corrupt, and kill.
And he shall be king of the Jews.

GADIAS. Perhaps Aristobulus, then?

HEROD. Wild is the time;
Abroad, Octavius and Marc Antony,
Like rival thunders from opposèd poles,
Are rushing to that shock which splits the world.
Now Antony is grappled to my side,
And on his victory this realm depends.

Enter in haste three MESSENGERS *followed by various* COUNCILLORS *and* CAPTAINS.

1ST M. Lo, out of Egypt, we — breathless, O king.

HEROD. Well — well?

1ST M. O king — disaster.

HEROD. Speak then, speak.

2ND M. O king, the demi-emperor of the world —

HEROD. Say — say.

2ND M. O king — Marc Antony is dead.

[*General consternation.*

HEROD. Antony dead? Antony dead? How slain?

3RD M. Off Actium his fleet from Cæsar fled.
He, with dishonour mad, fell on his sword.

HEROD. Antony dead?

GADIAS. Now trembles all Judæa.

HEROD. My sole friend of the world, grasping whose hand,
I feared not Cæsar nor the roar of Rome.
Can ye not hear the legions on the wind?
Now, now —

[*Several* CAPTAINS *rush in.*

CAPT. Arm — arm — and without pause.

ANOTHER. Equip
Ships on the instant.

COUN. Make submission straight.

PHER. Retire to the inner fort.

ANOTHER. To Antonia.

GADIAS. Bribe Cleopatra with the balsam groves
Of Jericho to hold young Cæsar fast
With kisses, till the stabber find his way.

HEROD. I will do none of these. I 'll go and meet
Octavius Cæsar.

GADIAS. Madness.

HEROD. If 't were thou.

1ST M. To Syria comes he, and must touch at
Rhodes.

HEROD. To Rhodes I go then.
[*General surprise.*
And I go to-night.

[*Various* COUNCILLORS *approach* HEROD *with dissuading gestures.*

HEROD. To-night! You are dismissed. To you,
Pheroras,
My legions on all frontiers or within
The walls: to you, Gadias, all the strings

Of policy I leave: whom to corrupt
And whom to kill, and whom to magnify:
To you, Sohemus, I commend the queen.
Away! Gadias, stay.

[*Exeunt* SOHEMUS *and* PHERORAS.

And yet to leave
Behind —

GADIAS. Ah — there my point is.

HEROD. Mariamne.

GADIAS. O Herod, others must you leave behind.
Aristobulus —

HEROD. Ah —

GADIAS. You go — and leave him
Brain of the east; by thee we stand or fall;
You are Judæa, and in this large thought
No single life is rich, not mine, not his.
This morn three fellows from Samaria
A plot to crown him, and to have your life.

HEROD. What messenger can tell me a new thing?

GADIAS. And knowing this, you leave that seed
of peril —

HEROD. But Mariamne loves him so.

GADIAS. Most plain
To all — indeed it seemed that — pardon.

HEROD. Cease.
And he is like to her about the brow —
I strike at Mariamne, striking him,
Perhaps even at myself; perhaps myself.

GADIAS. Then if because he hath her face, her
voice —

HEROD. Ah, hath he not?

GADIAS. A trick perhaps.

HEROD. A trick.
One could not get by heart that sweetness, not
From noon-foam of the Mediterranean
Nor long and leafy Lebanonian sigh
To lone Abanah under Syrian stars.

GADIAS. If for this likeness you postpone the realm,

'T were wiser not to go.

HEROD. I go —

GADIAS. And then —

Aristobulus.

HEROD. I have said it.

GADIAS. But

Aristobulus?

HEROD. I will flatter Cæsar —

GADIAS. Aristobulus then?

Enter SOHEMUS *in haste.*

SOH. The city is up;

The multitude about the temple roars

'Aristobulus,' and 'Herod the Upstart';

And blind Syllæus hails him as that king

That is to come.

GADIAS. You have no need of me,

You know my mind — and here are younger men.

[*Earnestly and privately to* HEROD *before going.*

Still must we trample, crush, corrupt, and kill?

[*Exit* GADIAS. *Murmurs outside.*

HEROD. Sohemus, in the midst of this I go
And leave behind Aristobulus — well,
I have preferred you, lifted you on high.

SOH. Herod, I am your slave, your dog.

HEROD. Well then,
If I should have a need of you. But how?
When I shall put this ring upon your finger,
Then one must be removed for the State's welfare.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. O king! the Prince Aristobulus asks
To say farewell to you.

Enter ARISTOBULUS.

ARIS. Brother, I come
To say farewell to you. I go to cool me
Outside the walls, and feared you should be gone
When I returned.

HEROD. [*Going to touch his head, but cannot.*] Farewell, Aristobulus.

ARIS. [*Lightly.*] And, sir, you leave the city in strong hands.
I have grown up in a day. Did you not hear
The acclamations as I waded hither
Knee-deep in flowers? You go then with less fear -
And Mariamne —

HEROD. Cease. Then whither go you?

ARIS. To bathe.

HEROD. To bathe? [*Looks at* SOHEMUS, *who starts.*

ARIS. Yonder in the great pool.

HEROD. And are you to deep waters used?

ARIS. Oh, yes.

HEROD. You know the pool well?

ARIS. Oh, from side to side.

HEROD. Yet are there no entangling reeds that drag
Downward?

ARIS. I fear them not. Ah, for the plunge,
The upward burst, and the long dart through waters.

HEROD. Go you alone?

ARIS. Oh, yes.

HEROD. Were it not well
Some other went with you — Sohemus here?

ARIS. I shall be glad of him.

HEROD. Stay not too long.

ARIS. Farewell then, Herod.

HEROD. I have said it.

ARIS. So?
It may be that I shall return in time.
But I so love the waters, I may linger
Floating upon my back thus, and my face
Skyward, and you depart not seeing me;
So now farewell!
Will you not look at me?

HEROD. Farewell again.

[*Exit* ARIS., *slowly*. SOHEMUS *starts for-*

ward. HEROD *puts the ring on his finger.*

SOH. O king!

[HEROD *points meaningly to* SOHEMUS *to follow* ARIS.

[*Exit* SOHEMUS.

HEROD. He hath her eyes.

Thou art too like to Mariamne — ah!

Enter ATTENDANT *from back.*

ATTEN. O king! the queen would have you go to her.

HEROD. The queen? ah, no. Not yet — not on the instant.

Say I will come at dusking, ere I go.

No, no; I cannot look on thee so soon.

I have struck him down, and fear is come on me;

Yet I ne'er feared before; not when I slew

The assembled Sanhedrin. Why do I tremble?

Not that I have contrived this murder, this

Most politic, most necessary act.

Then why this apprehension mystical,
This beaded forehead, and this quailing flesh?
Dimly I dread lest having struck this blow
Of my free-will, I by this very act
Have signed and pledged me to a second blow
Against my will. What if the powers permit
The doing of that deed which serves us now;
Then of that very deed do make a spur
To drive us to some act that we abhor?
The first step is with us; then all the road,
The long road is with Fate. O horrible!
If he being dead demand another death.

[*Walks backwards into* MARIAMNE'S *arms, she having entered softly behind him.*

MAR. You are in some peril, Herod?

HEROD. I? No—no.

MAR. But see, great drops have gathered on your brow.

HEROD. I am well now.

MAR. Then come — for the first time
You have deferred me — come — you go to-night,
Our love is at its noon — then be with me.

[*They slowly ascend the gallery steps. Half-way up he makes as if to descend.*

HEROD. I have a thing to do, and on the instant.

MAR. [*Putting her arm about him.*] 'T is not of such import.

HEROD. The pool!

MAR. Come, come.

[*They go off together. Music. Pause. The sky darkens.*

[*Various* WOMEN *and* BATHSHEBA *come slowly on in the gallery above. A tinkling sound rises up from the city. First a* WOMAN *enters, fanning herself.*

BATH. A breeze, a breeze. Did you not feel it?

A WOMAN. Yes.
But when again?

ANOTHER. I droop.

ANOTHER. I faint.

ANOTHER. Oh, when?

ANOTHER. Stand from me. Air is coming — ah!

ANOTHER. At last.

ANOTHER. Delicious.

ANOTHER. There is mercy from the West.

BATH. Slowly it lifts my hair.

ANOTHER. Listen, the trees.

WOMAN. The low long 'Ah' of foliage.

ANOTHER. And a star.

BATH. O breathing of balsam and of citron groves.
A moment!

ANOTHER. Myrtle then.

ANOTHER. And then a waft
Of cassia —

ANOTHER. And a wandering cedar scent.

ANOTHER. Now one can breathe. Come out into the cool.

[*Music. Exeunt* ALL *but* BATHSHEBA.

BATH. Above, star after star; in the city beneath
Lamp after lamp. Oh! would I were down there!
Now strings are touched, and they begin to dance.
Oh, would I were down there! How sweet the
night!

[*Exit.*

Enter CYPROS *and* SALOME.

SALOME. No; I 'll not stay.

CYPROS. A little patience, child.

SALOME. I hate her, mother.

CYPROS. Do I love her?

SALOME. Time
Hath taken the sting from you.

CYPROS. I do not waste it,
And when I dart it forth I kill, not prick.

SALOME. If you can patiently support —

CYPROS. I can,
And patiently prepare revenge.

SALOME. But how?

CYPROS. Child, I foresee, though dimly, a great vengeance.

SALOME. If I saw that —

CYPROS. Remember Herod's love —
That madness, easy to be worked upon —
For Mariamne. Then her love, how deep
For young Aristobulus.

SALOME. Yet how, how?

CYPROS. Still clearer then? Remember Herod's rage
At acclamations on her brother heaped;
Remember the set teeth and veilèd glare.

SALOME. Oh — I begin to see.

CYPROS. No more is ripe.
I keep this phial here close to my heart.
Did not the great astrologer foretell
'Herod shall famous be o'er all the world,
But he shall kill that thing which most he loves.'
I feared then; but not now.

SALOME. No — we are safe.

CYPROS. Then will you leave the palace?

SALOME. No; I'll stay
Upon the chance; yet would I tear her beauty
Thus with my nails.

CYPROS. You speak as might a girl,
But I will have —

SALOME. What — what?

CYPROS. Her life; no less;
I 'll send her to that democratic doom
Down to the levelling grave; and she shall die
Not at our hands.

SALOME. Who then shall do this thing?
Speak; who?

CYPROS. Wait: wait, I say, and watch.

[*Exeunt* CYPROS *and* SALOME.

HEROD. That star is languorous with divine excess!

MAR. O world of wearied passion dimly bright!

HEROD. Now the armed man doth lay his armour by,

And now the husband hasteth to the wife.

MAR. The brother to the sister maketh home.

HEROD. Now cometh the old lion from the pool.

MAR. And the young lion having drunk enough.

How still the time is for this journey wild.

But, Herod, you are going into peril.

HEROD. The peril hath a glitter for thy sake.

[*Comes down steps.*

MAR. Ah — must you go?

HEROD. To match myself with Rome.

Great difficulties bring delight to me.

MAR. And most for this I love you, and have loved,

That when you wooed, behind you cities crashed,

Those eyes that dimmed for me flamed in the breach,

And you were scorched and scarred and dressed in spoils,

Magnificent in livery of ruin.

You swept denial off and all delay,
You rushed on me like fire, and a wind drove you,
Thou who didst never fear, Herod, my Herod.
Now clasp me again as thou didst clasp me then,
When like a hundred lightning brands upsprung
In the night sudden. Then did you laugh out
And whirled me like a god through the dark away.

HEROD. How shall I go now?

MAR. I 'd not have you stay.
For could you stay you were no more my Herod.
How bright the towered world!

HEROD. The towered world;
And we, we two will grasp it, we will burst
Out of the East unto the setting sun.

MAR. Thou art a man.

HEROD. With thee will be a god;
Now stand we on the hill in red sunrise.

MAR. Now hand in hand into the morning.

HEROD. Ever

Upward and upward — ever hand in hand;
Shall nothing stay thy love, Mariamne, nothing?
Nothing shall stay it — nothing?

MAR. No — unless —

HEROD. What — what?

MAR. I cannot say — but —

HEROD. Mariamne,
Tell me that nothing —

MAR. Nothing from outside —

HEROD. How then?

MAR. Why speak of what shall never be?
Pull back my head, and look down in my eyes,
Herod, my Herod, such a love as grows
For you within me, it could never die.

HEROD. Ah!

MAR. And I take a kind of maiden pleasure
In hushing what I feel will be so wild,
In staying what I know shall be so swift;
This love could never fade.

HEROD. O eyes of dew!

MAR. Not time, absence, or age ever could touch it.

HEROD. O liquid language of Eternity!

MAR. Only—

HEROD. You start up and you lay both hands
Thus on my shoulder, and your eyes are full.
Close to my heart.

MAR. No — stand so far from me.

HEROD. Utter what is behind.

MAR. Yet might you kill it.

HEROD. Say —

MAR. In a night murder it — in a moment;
It is so brave you would not hear a cry,
But —

HEROD. If I did such murder then —

MAR. Oh, then —
You 'd stoop and lift a dead face up to you,
And pull me out from reeds like one just drowned,

More dead than those who die; and I should move,
Go here and there, and words would fall from me.
But, ah — you 'd touch but an embalmèd thing.
Do nothing, Herod, that shall hurt my soul.
Listen!

HEROD. O Mariamne.

MAR. Listen!

HEROD. What?

MAR. Be still; did you not hear it? Nearer now.

HEROD. What — what?

MAR. A wailing! And again you start
As once this noontide.

HEROD. Mariamne, say
That nothing ever shall divide us two.

MAR. Again! What hath been found?

HEROD. Ah; close to me

MAR. I cannot hear, I am all blind and dumb;
They are bringing what is found toward us, Herod.

HEROD. This cannot touch us.

MAR. And they bring it slowly.
They wail not for the old, as these are wailing.
Steps now —

HEROD. A knocking. Ere they shall come in
Say, Mariamne, nothing shall divide us.

MAR. Let them come in.

HEROD. Bring in your burden then.

[*Enter* BEARERS *with a litter on which lies a body covered over. Wailing women walk before and after.* HEROD *takes* MARIAMNE *away* R. *General Entrance.*

MAR. A moment stay, sirs. Now disclose the face. [*Reels back with a cry.*

SOH. The queen falls.

HEROD. [*Catching her in his arms.*]
Mariamne, die not.

MAR. Oh! [*Recovers herself slowly and with effort*

Sirs, set the litter here. I 'll sit by it.

And leave me, all of you.

HEROD. But I?

MAR. Oh, you;

You are my husband, stay.

[*Exeunt all but* HEROD *and* MARIAMNE.

HEROD. Mariamne, there 's no help — we can but give

Honour, and he in such magnificence

Shall lie — Mariamne, hear you? — that his tomb

Shall with its golden glory bear strange sails.

Will you not turn ever so little? There

Aloe and cinnamon and cassia balm

Shall breathe, and mighty poets will I charge

To make their verse in funeral thunders roll,

Or wail as women or wind out of the sea.

A word now — but a whisper.

Re-enter SOHEMUS.

SOH. All things wait.

Night rushes on us.

HEROD. Now into your hands

I do commend the queen. Mariamne, I

Am going into peril — say farewell.

MAR. [*Rising.*] I stand between the living and the dead.

[*Moving away.*

HEROD. For the last time — your lips for the last time.

MAR. Oh, take them, Herod, but —

HEROD. What have I done?

If she —

[*A trumpet.*

SOH. Away, O king, the trumpet calls.

HEROD. My bugle from the hill shall say farewell.

Hither from that dead body. Hither. I grow

Even jealous of the dead. Hither! Ah, no;

Farewell, farewell — for Rhodes.

[HEROD *rushes off, attended by* SOHEMUS.

MARIAMNE *remains by the litter.*

Enter PHERORAS *and* GADIAS.

PHER. Mariamne, we would not break in on you,
But unto me the army is committed.

[MARIAMNE *bows her head: exit* PHERORAS.

GADIAS. And unto me the strings of policy.

[MARIAMNE *bows her head.*

[GADIAS, *gazing on the body, and speaking as if to himself.*

Perhaps it is as well — as well for all:
He, had he lived, had been a public peril.

[*Exit* GADIAS.

MAR. [*Rising and looking after him.*] Perhaps it is as well — as well for all:
He, had he lived, had been a public peril.

[MARIAMNE *turns and looks at* SOHEMUS.

SOH. O queen, why are your eyes so fixed on me?
What is it I shall do? Shall I fetch hither

Bathsheba? Still your eyes between the candles
Burn through me. What then would you have me do?

[*Crosses at back to round* R.

MAR. Come hither and stand near to me, Sohemus.

[SOHEMUS *comes to her side.*

And he was a strong swimmer yet was drowned.

SOH. The entangling reeds.

MAR. Lay upon mine your hand.

SOH. O queen, I tremble at your touch.

MAR. This morn
The people cried out that he should be king.

SOH. It was a madness.

MAR. Look into my eyes.
Will you not? Kings have gazed in them.

SOH. O queen!
I am dazed; thy beauty takes away my life
And being.

MAR. Herod goes and leaves behind —

SOH. 'Tis very still.

MAR. You have been true to Herod?

SOH. O until death.

MAR. Yes, unto death. Sohemus,
Start not away.

SOH. O queen, I cannot stir.
I am held as in a dream.

MAR. Sohemus, stay.
Was not this dying fortunate for Herod?
Came it not just upon the time? O speak,
And fear not — kings must not be lightly blamed,
No, nor king's instruments. Now, in your ear,
Was not this drowning fortunate for Herod?

SOH. Oh, kill me, but command me not to speak.

MAR. A necessary death then. Was it so?

SOH. What shall I say?

MAR. The truth. I know it now.
This child was murdered.

SOH. Murdered?

MAR. They came round

And held him under, and great bubbles rose.
Now by this beauty can you answer No?

SOH. I — I — I cannot.

MAR. Go.

[*Exit* SOHEMUS.

[MARIAMNE *turns again to the litter. At this moment the faint sound of a bugle is heard far off, and in the distance torches are seen and* HEROD'S *retinue moving over a hill.* MARIAMNE *turns.*

Ah, Herod, Herod!

ACT II

SCENE. — *The hall of audience in* HEROD'S *palace as before, but ungarlanded; on various points of vantage without are* SENTINELS *watching for the arrival of* HEROD.

Enter SOHEMUS *meeting* GADIAS.

GADIAS. No sight yet of the king?

SOH. [*Calling up.*] The king in sight?

SENT. Nothing!

2ND S. Nothing!

GADIAS. And never will be sight.

SOH. Gadias!

GADIAS. Young Octavius is no fool!
Herod hath walked into Octavius's arms.

SOH. I trust 't is not so.

GADIAS. Yes, for every hour
The murmuring of the people louder grows.

1ST S. A cloud of dust!

2ND S. At last!

1ST S. See you —

2ND S. Ah, there.

GADIAS. Where is the queen?

SOH. Returned from dropping blooms
Upon the grave of young Aristobulus.

GADIAS. These passings 'twixt the palace and the tomb
Madden the multitude! They crane their necks,
Remembering her brother in her face.
Last morn there followed her a hoarse uproar.

SOH. When Herod shall —

GADIAS. *If* Herod shall —

SOH. Return —

GADIAS. Here 's his first task; in fear of mutiny,
Of mutiny by Mariamne roused,

To interdict these visits to the tomb.

And it shall be my business that he do so.

[*Exit* GADIAS.

1ST S. A solitary horseman —

2ND S. No —

1ST S. Indeed

It is. A furious and a lonely rider.

Enter MARIAMNE, *behind, clothed in black.*

MAR. [*To* SOHEMUS.] Then Herod left direction that if death

O'ertook him, I too should that moment die.

SOH. O queen, I have told unto your beauty what

No torture could have wrung, and have betrayed

My master's secrets.

1ST S. Ah! A golden breastplate!

2ND S. It cannot be.

1ST S. Yet look! O burning gold!

SOH. This was the very madness of his love!

How could he face that fear lest you should walk

Behind Octavius's high-triumphing car?

MAR. I might

Have seen a grandeur in this thought,

Even magnificence of flattery,

Once, but not now. The dead boy makes him vile

In this thing as in all things. Was not this

The tiger's act? beast fury!

1ST S. It is he!

2ND S. Impossible!

1ST S. 'T is he! Herod — the king!

[*Enter* GADIAS *and the Court, hastily.*]

SOH. Said you the king?

1ST S. The king, sir, all alone!

2ND S. Up on my shoulder there — see, see the king!

A CHILD. Show me! Show me!

ANOTHER. But where, O where?

ANOTHER. O look!

1ST S. Hark, how he thunders!

2ND S. White with foam the horse.

SOH. He leaps down, and his armour jangles loud.

ATTEND. The king, the king, he is rushing in alone.

1ST S. He clangs along the corridors —

2ND S. And burns

From pillar to pillar like fire before the wind.

HEROD. [*Without.*] Mariamne! Mariamne! Mariamne!

[HEROD *rushes in, while all present make obeisance.* MARIAMNE *alone remains standing. He makes his way to her and kisses her hand.*

GADIAS. O king, what tidings?

PHER. What success?

1ST C. What news?

HEROD. O unimagined! I will pour it forth!

Mariamne, I pursued and came on Cæsar —

A face young and yet wary.

I came in
Amid the courtiers, and omitted nothing
Of royalty but this my diadem.
Mariamne, do you hear? I did not cringe,
But stood and looked on him as man on man,
As king on king. Then I spoke out — I mourned
Dead Antony with frankness as my friend —
Mariamne, hear you? You shall glow at this —
And unto Cæsar proffered the same aid
I gave to Antony. 'Judge me,' I cried,
'By what I was to him — to you I 'll be
No worse a friend — You 'll say 't is policy —
I 'll not deny it; but 't is durable;
I am your friend by sea, by land henceforth,
If you will have me so.' Then, Mariamne,
He looked long on me — then without a word
[*Takes her hand.*
Gave me his hand, and bade me sit by him,
We sat together — do you listen? — and

He called for wine. 'I drink to my friend Herod
And to his Mariamne.'

MAR. [*Groaning.*] Ah!

[*On the groan he falls away from her, then looks in her face. With a gesture he dismisses the Court, who disperse, whispering.* HEROD *and* MARIAMNE *are left alone. He moves to embrace her with passion, but she repels him.*

MAR. I am come
From young Aristobulus that was murdered.

HEROD. Murdered!

MAR. Or taken as we take a dog
And strangled in that pool whose reeds I hear
Sighing within my ears until I die.
You like a tiger purred about me: oh!
Your part it was to soothe and hush me while
He gasped beneath their hands — your hands — O
yes,

You were not near, 't was yours to kiss and lie —
But none the less your hands were round his throat,
O liar!

HEROD. Mariamne!

MAR. You forest beast!

HEROD. Mariamne!

MAR. Back, and in the jungle burr
Whence you did leap out at my brother's throat.
Can you deny your part in this? O subtle!
Half suitor and half strangler, with one arm
About the sister's neck, the other hand
About the brother's throat!

HEROD. I 'll not endure —

MAR. Can you deny you slew Aristobulus?
Look in my eyes; speak truth if still 't is in you.

HEROD. I 'll not deny my part in the boy's death.

MAR. Will you weep now? Strive, and the tears will come.

HEROD. 'T was I — I, Herod — who commanded it.

MAR. Commanded!

HEROD. Yes, and would again command.

MAR. You! You — a sudden thing sprung up in the night —

To dip your hands in our most ancient blood!

That he should perish by an Idumean!

HEROD. I stand where I have climbed, and by your side

I could not leave him —'t was not for myself

I struck, but for the State — 't was for Judæa!

And for the throne — *your* throne — *your* throne —

MAR. O glib!

The assassin first, and now the orator!

HEROD. I 'll burn this bitterness away!

MAR. I am grown

Listless to all concerning you.

HEROD. [*Groaning.*] Ah — ah!

MAR. Herod, because I once did love you so —

How long since is it? — And because that love

With time had grown much greater, now I speak.
Even the red misery of my brother's murder,
That extreme pang, is pale beside this loss,
This drying up within me of my soul.

HEROD. O madness!

MAR. You have stopped my life, and ended
My very being in a moment. Here
[*Rising slowly.*
I stand and look on you who were my husband —

HEROD. [*Fiercely embraces her.*] And still, in spite of all.

MAR. No, never more!
Herod, that love I did conceive for you,
And from you, it was even as a child —
More dear, indeed, than any child of flesh,
For all its blood was as a colour of dreams,
And it was veined with visions delicate.
Then came a sudden labour ere my time —
Terrible travail — and I bring it forth,

Dead, dead. And here I lay it at your feet.

HEROD. I 'll break this barrier down as I have others.

MAR. Never — never!

HEROD. When first I wooed, was I

Not blood-stained?

MAR. Not with blood of his!

HEROD. O, still

You shall forget him. He is dead, and I

Live still, and glow, and sigh, and burn for you.

MAR. Almost I am moved to laughter at that passion

Which once could sway and thrill me to the bone.

Terrible when we laugh at what we loved!

HEROD. My brain, my brain, I shall go mad!

One kiss!

MAR. Never!

HEROD. One touch!

MAR. No more!

HEROD. One word!

MAR. Farewell!

HEROD. You will go from me?

MAR. No, I 'll move about
The palace. You shall have no scorn from me;
My love is dead, but I am still a queen;
Only, I must not be with you alone.

HEROD. Where 's now the boast, the glory, O
where now?
What was this triumph but in the telling of it
To you! And what this victory but to pour it
Into your ears! I had imagined all
Meetings but this — this only I foresaw not;
Here I disband my legions. Arise,
And spill the wine of glory on the ground;
I turn my face into the night. And yet
Why am I bowed thus — I that am Herod? Come.
I 'll take you in my arms. I 'll have your lips
By force, and chain your body up to me;
I am denied your soul, but I will slake
This thirst of the flesh, and drink your beauty deep!

MAR. [*Repulsing him.*] I 'll not endure your
touch! Your hands are curved
From that fell throttle. Now stretch out your
arms;
What is between us? It is more than air.
[*Wildly.*] I tell you, Herod, that your arm but then
Passed through the dead boy that now stands be-
tween us.

[*Passes up steps with a long, shuddering cry of horror.*

HEROD. Mariamne, leave me not thus, Mariamne!

[*Exit* MARIAMNE.

Aristobulus, art thou satisfied?
Oh! since my birth I have lived in fierce contrast,
For ever half in lightning, half in gloom;
The brighter still the public brilliance glows,
The deeper falls the darkness of the hearth.
Never the calm and uneventful warmth
Where other men like creatures bask and browse,

The metal of my mind attracts the tempest.

Enter GADIAS.

Gadias, is there any thirst like this?

Or any hunger like unto this hunger?

I am denied her lips, her touch.

GADIAS. I came

To speak on graver matters.

HEROD. Graver! Why?

GADIAS. The queen —

HEROD. 'T is her I speak of.

GADIAS. In your absence

HEROD. What? What?

GADIAS. Hath visited continually

The tomb of young Aristobulus.

HEROD. Why,

What need of her to pace those yards of earth?

Her spirit standeth by his tomb for ever.

GADIAS. There 's peril in this going to and fro.

HEROD. Think you if I forbade her that with time

The image of this boy might grow more dim?

GADIAS. O king, the matter is more grave. The people
Assemble now to see her pass. They whisper,
Then come to sullen threats. And yesterday
Rose up behind her a long, hoarse uproar.

HEROD. To have once possessed, and then to be debarred!

GADIAS. The Pharisees are fanning this chance flame.

HEROD. Now when I have returned in a fond glory —

Enter CYPROS *and* SALOME *behind.*

GADIAS. Pardon, O king, these goings to the tomb
Must be forbidden!

HEROD. Aching with great news.

GADIAS. Your pardon, but the people —

HEROD. Why, all this
Concerns me not.

GADIAS. O king!

HEROD. To me the people,
My mother, sister, you — all these are nothing —

GADIAS. Well —

HEROD. Speak of Mariamne, how to win her back.

GADIAS. You will take some measure to suppress —

HEROD. Suppress? No, but to kindle what is quenched.

[GADIAS *motions to* CYPROS *and* SALOME *with despairing gesture.*

GADIAS. I will return at some more prosperous moment.

[*Exit* GADIAS. CYPROS AND SALOME *come down.*

CYPROS. You waved us off. We with the crowd were banished,
But now that you have spoken with Mariamne
Your mother and your sister may perhaps
Have leave —

HEROD. I will not have your kiss — or hers!

I am exiled from Mariamne's lips.

SALOME. Why, would she not —

HEROD. When I rushed in, she rose

Like a black pine out of the bending wheat.

CYPROS. Doth she deny you?

HEROD. Utterly!

SALOME. Yet why?

HEROD. Because I killed Aristobulus.

SALOME. Oh!

CYPROS. Is this the sole cause?

HEROD. Why, what other?

CYPROS. Herod,

Men I well know that you can trample down,

Or flatter or deceive — women you know not.

HEROD. Well — well —

CYPROS. And you suppose this the sole cause?

HEROD. What mean you?

CYPROS. At the least I 'll fend and watch

Over you.

SALOME. Unto whom did you confide
This murder? Unto all the court?

HEROD. No — no.

CYPROS. To whom, then?

HEROD. To Gadias.

SALOME. To Gadias?

CYPROS. And to no other?

HEROD. To Sohemus.

SALOME. To —
Sohemus?

CYPROS. To Sohemus?

[HEROD, *ascending staircase, turns, looks from* CYPROS *to* SALOME, *then exit, with gesture of disbelief.*

CYPROS. He is now
Wrought to the very mood when we can use him
To strike at Mariamne. We must not
Suffer him now to cool.

SALOME. He is most silent.

CYPROS. And then most capable of dangerous act.

SALOME. How? How?

CYPROS. The queen is wont about this hour
To bring his posset to the king, which she
Prepares with her own hands. Now if a moment
I could distil this poison in the cup,
Then warn him not to drink!

SALOME. Still to and fro
He paces, making the vast room a cage.

[*Pause, moves up steps, and listens, kneeling.*

Still pacing up and down, and to and fro,
And now a sudden pause. And now again,
Like a stung creature, fitfully resumes.

Enter CUP-BEARER, *with a cup of wine.*

CYPROS. Ah, whither do you take that cup?

CUP-B. I take it
In to the king.

CYPROS. But the queen takes the cup.

CUP-B. To-day she will not take it.

CYPROS. Give it me.

[CUP-BEARER *comes over and hands her the cup.* CYPROS *smells it.*

The queen prepared this cup with her own hands?

CUP-B. The queen prepared the cup with her own hands.

[*As he bows low,* CYPROS *drops in the poison. As he looks up again, she again smells the wine.*

CYPROS. Does it not seem the wine has a strange smell?

[*Gives cup to* CUP-BEARER.

SALOMÉ. Most strange.

CYPROS. Or is it fancy?

CUP-B. A strange smell!

CYPROS. Were it not better then to warn the king Before he drinks it?

CUP-B. I will warn the king.

[*Exit up steps.*

CYPROS. Now, Herod being warned, will instantly
Summon the queen and ask of her to drink;
This is his mood. If she refuse, he 'll deem
She hath put poison in with her own hands.

SALOME. And if she drink it?

CYPROS. Then we see her fall —
For it is deadly — and die upon the instant.
So either way —

[*Cry from* HEROD *within.*

SALOME. A cry!

CYPROS. He is stung to madness.

SALOME. Or wounded, by his voice.

Enter HEROD, *in grim silence, with the* CUP-BEARER.

HEROD. [*To* ATTENDANT.] Summon the queen, Pheroras, and Gadias, and Sohemus.

[*A pause, during which enter* PHERORAS, SOHEMUS *and* GADIAS.

[HEROD *and* CUP-BEARER *stand motionless.*

Enter MARIAMNE, *and stands with*

back to door at top of steps, where she remains throughout following action.

HEROD. Did you prepare this cup with your own hands?

MAR. With my own hands as is my custom.

HEROD. Yet
You did not bring it me as is your custom.

MAR. I chose to send it.

HEROD. As it chanced, my mother
And sister intercepted the cup-bearer.

CYPROS. I had sworn to guard you, Herod.

HEROD. And they drew
A strange smell from the wine. Now drink it!
Drink.

MAR. [*Giving her the cup.*] Is this a second treachery? I know not.

[*Looks towards* CYPROS *and* SALOME, *and from them back to* HEROD.

He who could drown can poison.

HEROD. Drink it — or —

MAR. I am so weary, I will drink it, and
If it is mortal, then I go at once
Down to Aristobulus.
Now farewell!
Jerusalem, city of God, farewell,
My cradle first, my home, and now my grave,
For I, the last of all the Maccabees,
I, the lone daughter of that flaming line,
I perish without fear and without cry.
For a doom is come upon us, and an ending.
Brother, I drink and hasten down to you.

[*As she puts the cup to her lips*, HEROD *dashes it down.*

HEROD. Ah, no! though you prepared this for my death,
I cannot see you drink it.
Mariamne,
Now, even now —

MAR. [*Pointing to the spilt wine.*] Between us a red stream.

[*Angry shouts are heard from the city.*

PHERORAS *and* SOHEMUS *go out.*

CYPROS. What is that sound?

GADIAS. [*Listening.*] It was an angry sound.

Enter an OFFICER OF THE GUARD.

OFFICER. Your pardon, but our captain, where is he?

SALOME. What is the danger, then?

[*Exit* OFFICER.

CYPROS. What does this mean?

Crash is heard at the gates. PHERORAS *enters.*

PHER. They have shattered down the outer gate.

CYPROS. They? Who?

PHER. The mob, by Mariamne's public grief
To fury urged. They are beating at the palace.

SALOME. They are fighting.

CYPROS. There are groans and sudden falls.

PHER. Sohemus falls — he is wounded — they 'll break through.

HEROD. [*To* PHERORAS.] Call the reinforcements from the citadel,

So that they steal in and surround the mob.

Meanwhile, I will detain them in some speech.

When you are ready, let the trumpet sound.

[*Exit* PHERORAS.

[HEROD'S *guards are now forced back into the Hall, some falling. A* MOB *of political plotters, priests, and populace swarms in with stones, staves and chance weapons, blind* SYLLÆUS *in front.* HEROD *speaks from the stairs.*

Stand out, the chief of you, and answer me.

[SEVERAL *then stand out.*

The cause why you have broke into the palace.

SYLL. Herod, these sightless eyes can yet behold

The blood on you of young Aristobulus. [*A murmur.*

It is so bright, it dazzles even the blind.
And near to you his sister flaming stands;
Her wrongs, her injuries we will avenge.
Can you deny that you — you — struck him down?

HEROD. I struck him down! And did he live again,
Again I 'd strike him down. And any other
That 's in my path I 'll set my foot upon.

[*A murmur which swells into a roar.*

Why, why, then? Because Herod is Judæa;
I am your bulwark and your bastion; I,
Herod alone.

A MAN. You have sold us to the Roman.

[*Cries of* '*Yes, yes.*'

A MAN. Antony 's dead!

ANOTHER. And Cæsar lives.

ANOTHER. You chose
The wrong.

HEROD. 'T is true that Antony 's dead.
'T is true

[*Murmurs.*

That Cæsar lives. And I this very day
Have come from grasping Cæsar's hand, and him
I now have grappled to my side as once
I grappled Antony. I have sold you to the Roman?
Now hearken with what gifts I come from Rome.
Henceforward in all cities which Rome sways,
Freedom to each Jew by our ancient law,

[*Movements and murmurs of satisfaction checked by a gesture from* HEROD.

So long as I reign o'er you and my heirs.
Then leave to adore the God of Israel —

[*Renewed murmurs of gratitude, again checked by* HEROD.

So long as I reign o'er you and my heirs.
Last, in all cities under Roman rule,
The heavy hand of persecution
Upon our people shall be lifted up
And all our burdens lightened from henceforth,

[*Applause.*

So long as I reign o'er you and my heirs.
Some other cause then? Stand you out and speak.

A Priest. You would destroy the Temple.

Herod. But to build
A vaster Temple and more glorious.
This task have I foreseen and have prepared;
And now I bid you on the instant choose
A thousand priests to work in metal and ore
Until this mightier Temple shall arise.
Till then no stone of the old sanctuary
Shall be removed. To priests and priests alone
I give the charge — I am not worthy of it.
I will enrol a thousand priests to-day.

[*Murmurs of satisfaction renewed among priests and populace.*

Now I come down among you.

[*He descends.*

Here 's my breast.
Now strike who wills. Does any hesitate?

Why, such a blow as this none ever struck
That breathed since the beginning of the world;
For he who strikes this breast, strikes at a city,
Who stabs at this my heart, stabs at a kingdom.
These veins are rivers, and these arteries
Are very roads. This body is your country.
Strike — strike — strike! None of you?

[*Trumpet. Armed men appear at the back, filling the corridors and colonnade.*

Lo then my spears
That circle you about with no escape!
I lift my finger and all ye are dead!

CROWD. [*Fawningly.*] O Herod!

HEROD. But I will not. Go!
[*To* POLITICIANS.] And you!
Remember with what gifts I come from Rome.
[*To* PRIESTS.] You to the task of building gird yourselves.
[*To* MOB.] And you, my people, now depart in peace,

And ere you sleep, give to Jehovah thanks
That Herod is your shepherd and your king!

[THEY *come round him, some kneeling, kissing his garments, and gradually disperse. Exeunt* MOB.

CYPROS. [*To* HEROD.] Now 't is our lives or hers.

SALOME. She hath denied you
Her lips, her love.

CYPROS. She hath prepared you poison.

GADIAS. These things are not important. That which was
A private trouble between you and her
Is now a public peril. 'T is not you
That now are shaken, but the throne itself.

PHER. Brother, that this will cost you a fierce pang
I know — but for the country she must die.

GADIAS. And quickly.

CYPROS. Kill her, Herod.

SALOME. Kill her! kill her!

HEROD. Would you commit such beauty to the earth?

Those eyes that bring upon us endless thoughts!
That face that seems as it had come to pass
Like a thing prophesied! To kill her!
And I, if she were dead, I too would die,
Or linger in the sunlight without life;
Oh, terrible to live but in remembering!
To call her name down the long corridors;
To come on jewels that she wore, laid by;
Or open suddenly some chest, and see
Some favourite robe she wore on such a day!
I dare not bring upon myself such woe.

GADIAS. 'T is not yourself, O king, it is the State.

PHER. It is our country that asks this of you.

HEROD. If it must be, then, here I sit in judgment!

[*Moves to throne and sits.*

I call upon you, Mariamne, here
To answer for yourself that you deny

All rights of marriage unto me your husband.
Answer.

CYPROS. She will not.

SALOME. Cannot — rather say.

HEROD. Then for this poison of your own preparing.

SALOME. She cannot speak.

CYPROS. No answer still?

SALOME. You hear.

HEROD. Last, for this insurrection of your making,
You stir my people up against their king,
They break into the palace, and would have slain us.

GADIAS. This visiting so oft your brother's tomb
Has wrought the people up to mutiny.

MAR. I 'll not forbear my visits to his tomb —
No, not though all Jerusalem went mad,
And pulled these pillars down upon our heads.

HEROD. Remember, I have power upon your life,
That I can sentence you to death.

MAR. Oh, that!

PHER. What further need of words?

CYPROS. Or witnesses.

HEROD. Then as a traitor not alone to me,
But to the State itself, you have incurred
The pains of death.

MAR. I am ready.

CYPROS. Let her die.

GADIAS. King, she must die.

HEROD. Away from us a moment.

[*Exeunt all but* MARIAMNE *and* HEROD. HEROD *beckons her down; she comes before him.*

MAR. Herod, I cannot change — my love is dead.

HEROD. Die then yourself — die, die upon the instant.
Such beauty should pass suddenly away,
Such loveliness should vanish like the lightning,
Die — die —
But ere you go, witness at least

That never woman was so loved as thou,
That never man from the beginning loved
As I.

MAR. [*Moves down to him.*] And yet you left behind direction
That were you slain, that moment I should die.

HEROD. Here has imagination made me cruel,
So that one death should end what is one life,
And we two simultaneously cease:
If cease we do, let 's perish the same instant.
Never could I decay while you still breathed,
Nor could I rot while you moved in the light;
What grave could hold me fast? What sepulchre
Could so press on me that I would not rend it?
Burn me in fire, and see me ashes, yet
No lighted fire hath force upon this fire:
Or did I live again, then should I float
All inarticulate and invisible
About you still — mad to recover words —

A spirit groping for the trick of speech,
Mad for the ancient touches of the hand,
Yet wordless, handless, helpless, near yet dumb.
Close, yet unseen. This was the love I bore you.

MAR. A tiger's fury — not the love of man!

[*Turns to go.*

HEROD. [*Moves up to steps.*] O stay yet!
I forgive the love denied:
See — I forgive the poison. I but crawl
Here at your feet, and kiss your garments' hem,
And I forgive this mutiny — all — all —
But for one kiss from you, one touch, one word.
O like a creature, I implore some look,
Some syllable, some sign, ere I go mad,
Mariamne! Mariamne! Mariamne!

[MARIAMNE *goes out without saying a word or looking round.*

[*Throwing himself on steps.*] I am denied her soul,
and that which was

A glow hath now become a wasting flame.
I am a barren, solitary pyre!

[*Takes ashes from brazier and strews them over his head.*

Enter PHERORAS, GADIAS, CYPROS *and* SALOME.

PHER. I will give order for the execution.

CYPROS. Let her drink poison — die by that same death
Prepared for you.

[PHERORAS *is about to go up steps.*

HEROD. Pheroras, and you others,
I 'll not excuse her, but she had at least
Some provocation in that fierce command
I left behind that should I die, she too
Should perish.

[SALOME *exchanges look with* CYPROS.

SALOME. And to whom did you confide
So intimate, so secret a command?
Not to Gadias?

GADIAS. No.

HEROD. Why, to Sohemus.

SOH. Oh, take me to the king.

Enter, dying of wounds received in attack on palace.

Forgive me, Herod.

[*Dies.*

HEROD. He was my friend!

CYPROS. Your friend! And yet from him
She learned the murder of Aristobulus?

SALOME. But this command, so dear, so perilous,
Would not be blurted out — 't was wrung from him.

HEROD. Impossible! By torture?

SALOME. No, perhaps
By loveliness more terrible than torture —
Slow sweetness with more exquisite a pang.

CYPROS. He was so true, no tortures could have shook him.

SALOME. Only in one way drew she this from him.

CYPROS. Know, son, that women the most delicate,

And most high-born, feed often on strange fancies ;
They are so screened, they come to long for peril,
And we are secret, Herod — very secret.

SALOME. Thus only, Herod, lying on his breast,
And gazing in his eyes, one arm about him,
Could she have drawn him, swooning at her sweetness,
To such betrayal.

HEROD. Like a fiend you hold me
In an eternal torture.

SALOME. Till he gave
His soul up in the incense of her hair.

HEROD. [*Throwing* SALOME *from him.*] Devil !

CYPROS. And, Herod, not for the first time
She hath languished for a soldier lowly born.

HEROD. Incredible ! Unthinkable ! And yet,
O God ! Sohemus' cry, ' Forgive me, Herod ! '

CYPROS. A dying cry !

HEROD. [*Rushing to the body and kneeling.*]
Sohemus, speak — speak — speak !

Thou art not dead so long — art but a little
The other side of the grave, and canst reveal —
If not, let God then thunder through your lips —
He is dumb — and God himself is silent! Kill her!

GADIAS. He has said it!

CYPROS. Oh, at last! Let her drink poison —
And on the instant.

GADIAS. Quickly, lest he change.

[*Exit* SERVANT, *quickly.*

HEROD. I have said it! And it was foretold of me
That I should slay the thing that most I loved.
Fate is upon me with the hour, the word.
A dreadful numbness all my spirit seals.
Yet will I not be bound, I will break free,
She shall not die — she shall not die — she shall not —

Trumpets. Enter ATTENDANT.

ATTEND. O king, the Roman eagles! See!

A CRY. [*Without.*] From Rome!

Enter ROMAN ENVOY *and* SUITE.

ENVOY. O king, great Cæsar sent us after you,
But, though we posted fast, you still outran us.
Thus then by word of mouth great Cæsar greets
Herod his friend. But he would not confine
That friendship to the easy spoken word,
And hear I bear a proof of Cæsar's faith.
Herein is added to thy boundaries
Hippo, Samaria and Gadara,
And high-walled Joppa, and Anthedon's shore,
And Gaza unto these, and Straton's towers.

[*Moves down.*

Here is the scroll, with Cæsar's own hand signed.

HEROD. [*Taking the scroll — at foot of steps.*]
Mariamne, hear you this? Mariamne, see you?

[*Turns to look at scroll.*

[SERVANT *enters and moves down to* GADIAS *down* L.

[*He goes up the stairs.*

Hippo, Samaria and Gadara,

And high-walled Joppa, and Anthedon's shore,

And Gaza unto these, and Straton's towers.

SERV. [*Aside to* GADIAS.] O sir, the queen is dead!

GADIAS. [*Aside to* PHERORAS, CYPROS *and* SALOME.]

The queen is dead!

HEROD. Mariamne, hear you this? Mariamne, see you?

[*Repeating the words and going up steps.*

Hippo, Samaria and Gadara,

And high-walled Joppa, and Anthedon,

[*As he moves up.*

And Gaza unto these, and Straton's towers!

ACT III

SCENE. — *The Hall of Audience as before; sunset. The* CHIEF CAPTAINS, COUNCILLORS *and* PRIESTS *assembled, including* GADIAS, *a* PHYSICIAN, CYPROS, *etc. On one side of the throne stand* PRIESTS, *who are displaying ivory and marble and precious stones. On the other side are various* ARCHITECTS *and* CHIEF MASONS, *who are eagerly displaying charts and plans. As the Curtain rises there is the hum of many voices, but* GADIAS *rising to speak with uplifted hand, there is a sudden silence.*

GADIAS. Priests, councillors and captains nigh the throne,
Who are partakers of our private mind;
Long time, ye know, the melancholy king

Herod hath brooded by the Dead Sea wave
Incapable of empire: but to-day
Returns to grasp the reins of sovereignty.

[*A murmur of approbation.*

Priests, councillors and captains nigh the throne,
All Jewry on that single brain depends.
Herod alone defers the Roman doom,
That general fate whereto the world is born.

[*A low assenting murmur.*

That moment when the reason of the king
Shall tremble, trembles with it all this realm.
And now it seems that by the Dead Sea marge
Long since his mind had maddened, but for one
Idea with which he still doth rock himself.

[*A movement of surprise.*

Some fancy, all incredible to me,
But which alone diverts insanity,
And what this is, from the Physician hear!

PHYS. Councillors, priests, my business is to mend

The mind, not mingle with affairs of State.
Now listen: though the embalmèd queen is cold,
Yet from that irremediable thought
The king's brain starts aside: such is his love
He dares not to imagine she is dead.

[*A movement of astonishment.*

And in the wild foam of insanity
He clasps this rock: that Mariamne lives.
Once let her death rush in upon his brain,
Madness will seize him!

PRIEST. And darkness the land.

GADIAS. Seeing the issue then how vast; whate'er
You and myself may deem of this, our aim
Must be to fend from him reality,
And for as long as may be to conspire
Against the idea of Mariamne's death.

PHYS. [*Pointing to* PRIESTS.] With ivory distract him and with gems!
Have music to avert some sudden rush,

And dancers to allure him from the truth.
If he send messages unto the dead,
Let messages be carried: if he ask
An answer from the dead, be answer given.
Only from one thought save him!

PRIEST. And so save
Your wives, your children, this beloved land
From ruin and the nearing roar of Rome!

PHYS. Remember, if we can but bring him safe
Through the sharp crisis of his malady;
If for the first few hours of his return
We can with music and with gems divert him
From realising Mariamne's death,
Then is there hope that he, with stealing time
And reconciling lapse of quiet hours,
May come to acquiesce and to submit
To the dread fact of Mariamne's death.

Enter SALOME.

GADIAS. Princess Salome!

SALOME. Mother, he is coming.
We must be tender with him: this is left us.
[*She turns to Court.*
Councillors, priests, my brother now is coming.
When you shall see him — if there be of you
Any that envied or that hated him,
His face shall make you to forget your wrongs.
[*A movement of sympathy.*
I have been close to him by day, by night,
When he would dash him 'gainst Masada's walls
With piteous climbings; for it seemed to him
That he again was bearing off the queen.
I have been near him when like some wild beast
He turned upon himself as on some prey;
But me he loathes, and 'Mariamne' cries,
And 'Mariamne!' until I, who wrought
This ruin, would revive her if I might.
I would support — how gladly now! — her look,
Her high disdain, I would bow down to it,

Only to bring her in alive to him:
But he shall not be happy till he die.
And now far more to see her face again,
As he imagines, than to take up rule,
He cometh hither.

PRIEST. Hither?

SALOME. Here he saw her
Last; and he heard her speak for the last time.
O sirs, let him not rush in on her body
Suddenly: but by every art divert him
From realising that the queen is dead.

[*Murmurs are heard without.*

GADIAS. He comes.

PHYS. Each man stand sentinel 'gainst truth,
And watch the gates against reality!

A CRY. The king!

[*Nearer.*] The king!

[*Near the throne.*] The king!

THE COURT. Herod, all hail!

Enter HEROD *unkempt and in ragged apparel. He slowly ascends the throne and sits in it.*

GADIAS. O king, restore to us that mastering brain,
That grappling will, those disentangling hands.

THE COURT. Herod, Herod!

HEROD. The business now?

GADIAS. O king!
Since thou wast sitting where thou sittest now,
A pestilence hath fallen upon the land,
Then famine! And the realm is filled with bones.
What should we do? Where 's succour and where hope?
To me it seemed —

HEROD. Import from Egypt grain!
And I myself out of my private purse
Will fifty thousand of my subjects feed.
Dispatch to Egypt!

COUNCILLOR. The king's mind is clear
Still, there is hope.

HEROD. This is the hour — is 't not? — when Mariamne —

GADIAS. [*Interrupting.*] Lo! the chief builders, masons, engineers,

Who make at thy command the sea-coast ring
From Gaza northward unto Cæsarea.

CHIEF BUILDER. O king, since thou wast sick all idle stands
In scaffolded and roofless interruption,
An unborn desolation of blank stone,
Bird-haunted as a dead metropolis.

HEROD. I will create a city of my own;
And therefore with sea-thwarting bastions
And mighty moles have made impregnable
That beach where Cæsarea shall arise.

[*He passes his hand over his brow.*

How easy this! Yet against flooding thoughts —

[*Sits.*] [*Turns to the Court.*

Well, well, a harbour then for every nation,

Whereon shall ride the navies of the world.
There vessels from the sunset shall unlade;
The harbour one vast bosom shall become
For towering galleons of the ocean weary;
For driven things a place of rest. Rest — rest —
How easy this — yet for the driven mind!
[*Suddenly.*] Go, tell the queen that I would speak to her.
[*A general movement.*
She knows not yet I am returned?

GADIAS. O king!

Not yet!

HEROD. Then tell her I would speak to her.
[*An* ATTENDANT *starts to go.*
Come hither you! I will not have her vexed,
Nor troubled to come; perchance she is asleep,
Asleep — then rouse her not — you understand.
I 'll wait her waking. [*Exit* ATTENDANT.
[HEROD *turns to the Court.*
This then is my design.

And now that in my coffers 'gins to pour
Pearl of barbaric kings and savage gold,
And emeralds of Indian emperors,
And wafted ivory in silent night,
And floated marble in the moonbeams, now
That the green waves are glooming pearls for me,
And metals cry to me to be delivered,
And screened jewels wait like brides, I 'll have
No stint — no waiting on how much, how far —
[GADIAS *beckons* CHIEF ARTIFICER.
You understand?

CHIEF A. O king, even now the city
Seems rising as by incantation!
Each dawn new spires will dazzle, sudden towers
And masonry in morning magical.

HEROD. Hence to the coast! And every hour dispatch
New messengers of rising domes and halls,
And terraces of bloom and blowing gardens,

Or some repulse of the invading sea!

CHIEF A. O king! it shall be done.

HEROD. Dismiss them. Where

[*Exeunt* ARTIFICERS, *etc.*

Is he I sent in to the queen — how long?

A PRIEST. Lo! those whom thou hast caused to build the Temple,

The chief artificers in gold and silver,

Marble and porphyry and red pumice-stone,

Trimmers of jewel sparks —

HEROD. Pour out those pearls,

And give me in my hand that bar of gold. [*Rises.*

I heard an angel crying from the Sun,

[*Court listen intently.*

For glory, for more glory on the earth;

And here I 'll build the wonder of the world.

I have conceived a Temple that shall stand

Up in such splendour that men bright from it

Shall pass with a light glance the pyramids.

I 'll have —

Re-enter ATTENDANT.

Ah! come you from the queen? Fear not.
She is asleep? [*Murmur of satisfaction.*

GADIAS. [*To whom* ATTENDANT *has whispered.*]
She is fallen in a deep sleep.

HEROD. Ah, rouse her not.

[*To* ATTENDANT.]

You did not touch her? No?
You did not speak o'er loud? She did not stir then?

ATTEND. O king! she stirred not once.

HEROD. Such sleep is good.
But there was still the moving of the breast?

ATTEND. O king —

HEROD. [*Hastily.*] Yes — yes — I understand — I —

PRIEST. Sir,
Each moment wasted from this huge emprize
The Temple —

HEROD. [*To* ATTENDANT.] Hither! Quietly in my ear.

I say — you saw — her bosom stirred?

ATTEND. I saw —

HEROD. You saw! It is enough!

[*To Court.*] Bear with me — oh!

I dreamed last night of a dome of beaten gold
To be a counter-glory to the Sun.
There shall the eagle blindly dash himself,
There the first beam shall strike, and there the moon
Shall aim all night her argent archery;
And it shall be the tryst of sundered stars,
The haunt of dead and dreaming Solomon;
Shall send a light upon the lost in Hell,
And flashings upon faces without hope —

[*Murmur of sympathy.*

And I will think in gold and dream in silver,
Imagine in marble and in bronze conceive,
Till it shall dazzle pilgrim nations
And stammering tribes from undiscovered lands,
Allure the living God out of the bliss,

And all the streaming seraphim from heaven.

[HEROD *looks at door and sits.*

[*A murmur of admiration.*

That bag of emeralds give it to me — so:

And yonder sack of rubies; I will gaze

On glittering things.

[*Sits listlessly, hands down.*

Let one of you go forth

And rouse the queen — not roughly be it done —

But rouse her! I would have her waked from sleep

[*A general embarrassment.*

Why linger you? Is it not easy? Go you,

Bathsheba, child, and touch her gently — thus.

There is no haste for her to come — I am

Not over-eager, and will wait — but rouse her!

Rouse her — or — go!

[*Exit* BATHSHEBA *in lingering terror.*

HEROD *again turns to the Court.*

Now, sirs, unceasingly

Let all the sounds of building rise to me
By day, by night — and now let anvils clang,
Melodious axes ring through Lebanon,
Masons let me behold so far aloft
They crawl like flies, ant-like artificers,
Swarming with tiny loads, and labourers
Hither and thither murmuring like bees.
Away with inspiration of these words!

[*Exeunt* CHIEF ARTIFICERS.

Is Bathsheba returned? 'T is a light task
To rouse a sleeping woman, to awake her.
'T is all I ask: I'd not compel her here;
I do not ask things out of reason — only
To know that she is waked — to know — to know.

Re-enter BATHSHEBA, *who whispers to* GADIAS.

GADIAS. O king, the queen is waked!

HEROD. 'T is all I ask.
I am not o'er-impatient. Bathsheba,

[BATHSHEBA *goes trembling up to the* KING.

Knows she as yet I am returned?

BATH. O king,

I — I —

HEROD. [*Quickly.*] Ah, yes! Speak not — no, speak not, child,

I understand — she has learned it. Bathsheba,

Speak low now, said she anything?

BATH. O king,

I — I —

HEROD. No matter. No, repeat it not!

I can so well imagine those first words.

But, child, you heard her speak? I ask no more,

You heard the sound of spoken words?

BATH. O king —

HEROD. You heard her — yes — it is enough; but I —

SALOME. Lo! the musicians whom you did command —

HEROD. Touch me not — sister — ah!

SALOME. Forgive me, brother

Enter MUSICIANS.

HEROD. Music, O music! Now create a land
From lovely chords, that land where we would be;
Where life no longer jars, nor jolts, but glides;
The end may recompense us, but meantime
[*Rises and looks at door.*] Too bare, O God, too
bare thy universe!
I am so hurt that the half-light seems good
There should be veils between us and the sun.
[*Music.*
Or why not ever moonlight, ever the moon
With bathing and obliterating beauty?
Now introduce with melody a life
Which we can live, where there is no farewell,
Nor any death, but —
[*He looks towards the door again, rises and sits again.*

SALOME. Listen, brother, listen.

[*They play soft music before the* KING;

after a while he starts up, he is soothed for a moment.

HEROD. Bathsheba, go again and ask the queen
To come to me. [*A movement and murmur.*
I am not mad! Look not
So wildly! [HEROD *rises.* *Music stops.*

HEROD. Say to her I have been patient,
I have been very patient. [*Moves down.*] Ask of her,
That for the sake of that one night when I,
[*Taking* BATHSHEBA *by the arm.*
Catching her thus, burst thro' the robber swords,
And she feared not, but looked up in my eyes,
That she will come to me when she hath robed.
[*Beating his hands gently together.*
But oh, oh, she must come!

PHYS. O king, the minstrel
That singeth to the dulcimer —

HEROD. [*Puts the* PHYSICIAN *aside.*]
[*To* BATHSHEBA.] Say to her

I have guessed sweet messages, fond brevities,
But you, so young, know that the sight is much.

GADIAS. Go, child, and bid the queen to robe and come.

HEROD. I have been very patient.

SALOME. Lo, the minstrel!
O listen, brother, listen.

[*The* BOY *sings to a dulcimer, but as the last notes die away, the* KING *rises slowly.*

HEROD. I have a fear!

GADIAS. Will you not make, O king,
Some gift to the sweet singer?

HEROD. Take this ruby.

Re-enter BATHSHEBA, *who whispers to* GADIAS.

Ah, she will come?

GADIAS. The queen but waits to robe her
And she will come.

HEROD. [*Sits.*] Why doth the child for ever
Pour in your ear the tale which you repeat?
And you, Gadias, think you not the king

That is to come, might with pure gentleness
Found such a kingdom as no sword could make?

GADIAS. O king, a folly!

HEROD. Is it — is it? Ah!
The queen! She comes not yet — and oh, Gadias —
Oh, if she cannot come!

GADIAS. Cannot!

HEROD. I say
Cannot! She would — she hath forgiven all.
Yet cannot traverse with her feet those yards
That separate us. If she would — but cannot!
I tell you we are fooled by the eye, the ear,
These organs muffle us from that real world
That lies about us, we are duped by brightness.
The ear, the eye doth make us deaf and blind;
Else should we be aware of all our dead,
Who pass above us, through us and beneath us.
[*Recovering.*
O little Bathsheba [*She moves down.*], how beautiful

You seem — for you have twice gone in to her
And twice come back. I have a fear.

[*Rises wildly.*

PHYS. O king!

Enter at a sign from PHYSICIAN *a* TROUPE OF DANCING GIRLS *who perform a slow, elaborate dance; but at its height, and when the movements are growing furious, suddenly the* KING *is seen in the midst, unkempt, ragged, and scattering the* DANCERS.

HEROD. Mariamne!

GADIAS. [*To* PHYSICIAN.] Now, what's best?
Quickly devise.

HEROD. Mariamne! Mariamne!

A COUNCILLOR. [*To* PHYSICIAN.] Now Judæa
Hangs on thy wit.

PHYS. Myself am crazed almost.

HEROD. Mariamne, Mariamne, Mariamne,
Come, come!

[*He rushes up the gallery to the door, at which he casts himself, sinking exhausted on steps. Amid the consternation,* BATHSHEBA *goes up, and taking his hand, leads him gently down like a child until he again sits on the throne.*

CYPROS. [*Placing her hands on his shoulders.*] My child,

I bore thee 'neath a wild moon by the sea.

[HEROD *puts* CYPROS'S *hands gently away.*

GADIAS. O Herod, thou art royal, rise and reign.

HEROD. [*Recovering himself.*] I had forgotten. I am still a king!

Bring me my crown, and set it on my head.

[GADIAS *puts his crown on his head.*

GADIAS. All hail! all hail! Herod, king of the Jews!

[*Court repeat the cries.*

HEROD. Bring forth the purple robe and vest me in it.

[CUP-BEARER *brings his robe. They crown and robe him.*

Summon the queen, and on the instant: I 'll
Not tarry for long robe or ornament.
Councillors, captains, priests! Is there delay?
Look on me and look well! Am I that Herod
That ere the beard was on me, burned up cities,
That fired the robbers out of Galilee?
That shook the Parthian and left him dead,
Blew like a blast away the Arabian,
Who grappled to my side great Antony,
And after bound Augustus as my friend?

THE COURT. Herod, Herod, Herod!

HEROD. [*Through murmur.*] Am I that Herod
Who builded yonder amphitheatre
Rivalling Rome? who lured into these ports
Wealth of the world, a Temple have conceived
That shall dispyramid the Egyptian kings?
That so have lived, wrought, suffered, battled, loved?

I have outspanned life and the worm of God,
Imagining I am already dead
Begins to prey on me. Am I that Herod?
[*Cries of* 'HEROD, HEROD, HEROD!'
Then on the instant let the queen be brought.
I 'll see her with my eyes in flesh and blood;
Oh, nothing yet hath stopped me: to my will
No limit hath been set. Summon the queen,
Or I will call not earthly vengeance down.
I have exhausted earth, I 'll fetch the lightning
And call on thunder like an emperor! [*Moves down.*
And henceforth I discard Augustus's aid;
I 'll bribe Jehovah as my new ally,
Flatter the Holy One to be my friend —
I 'll — I 'll — I 'll —
[*Falls back into* PHYSICIAN'S *arms.*
If you would avert a doom
Unheard, unthinkable — summon the queen!

PHYS. There is no other way.

GADIAS. [*To* ATTENDANT.] You then go forth
And bring the queen with ceremony in.

[*Exeunt* ATTENDANTS. *After a pause* HEROD *again starts up.*

HEROD. [*Standing.*] Why, if I am denied the sight of her,
If there hath been mischance to her — I say not
There hath been — yet so fineless is my will,
I 'll re-create her out of endless yearning,
And flesh shall cleave to bone, and blood shall run.
Do I not know her, every vein? Can I
Not imitate in furious ecstasy
What God hath coldly made? I 'll re-create
My love with bone for bone and vein for vein.
The eyes, the eyes again, the hands, the hair,
And that which I have made, O that shall love me.

[*With arms extended towards door, he throws himself on throne. He buries his head in anguish. Steps are heard*

and the embalmed QUEEN *is carried in and laid at the foot of the throne. There is a pause of pained expectancy.* HEROD *slowly raises his face and descends. He touches her on the forehead and stands suddenly rigid with a fixed and vacant stare.*

PHYS. He is stricken, and in catalepsy bound.

[*Trumpets are heard.*

A CRY. From Rome, from Rome, way for the messengers
From Rome; on Cæsar's business. Make a path
For Cæsar's envoys! Way there!

Knock. Enter ENVOYS, *who make obeisance to* HEROD.

1ST E. Cæsar, O king,
Confers on thee the kingdom of Arabia,
On thee and on thy heirs. What Herod's sword
Hath won, let Herod's wisdom pacify!
'T is Cæsar's pleasure; and with this he sends

A sceptre all inlaid with western gems,
The symbol of this added sovereignty.

[HEROD *remains motionless.*

GADIAS. The king is stricken, and can stir not, sirs.

1ST E. O thou Judæa! O thou frozen land!

2ND E. O thou mute East!

3RD E. Motionless Orient!

THE COURT. All hail, O hail, Herod! Herod, all hail!

SALOME. [*To* PHYSICIAN.] O lives there any hope
for him at last?

PHYS. Rest, and a world of leaves, and stealing stream
Or solemn swoon of music may allure
Homeward the ranging spirit of the king.
These things avail: but these things are of man.
To me indeed it seems, who with dim eyes
Behold this Herod motionless and mute,
To me it seems that they who grasp the world,
The kingdom and the power and the glory,
Must pay with deepest misery of spirit,

Atoning unto God for a brief brightness,
And ever ransom, like this rigid king,
The outward victory with inward loss.

CH. PRIEST. Now unto Him who brought His people forth
Out of the wilderness, by day a cloud,
By night a pillar of fire; to Him alone,
Look we at last and to no other look we.

[*Slowly and silently the whole Court melt away, one or two coming and looking on the* KING, *then departing.* HEROD *is left alone by the litter, standing motionless. The Curtain descends: then rises, and it is night, with a few stars. It descends, and again rises, and now it is the glimmer of dawn which falls upon* HEROD *and* MARIAMNE, *he still standing rigid and with fixed stare in the cataleptic trance.*

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